

Moss as a pabulum for *Hepialus hecta* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Lep.: Hepialidae)

Heath (1976, *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* 1: 166) says that the larvae of all British species of Hepialidae are subterranean, feeding on roots. The only foodplant that he records (*op. cit.*: 169) for *Hepialus hecta* (Linnaeus, 1758) is *Pteridium aquilinum* (L.) Kuhn. Emmet (1991, *The Moths and Butterflies of Great Britain and Ireland* 7 (2): 66-67) gives the foodplants for this species as the roots of *Pteridium* [*aquilinum*] and herbaceous plants. Porter (1997, *The Colour Identification Guide to Caterpillars of the British Isles (Macrolepidoptera)*) states that the foodplants are the roots of bracken, *Pteridium aquilinum*, and possibly grasses. As far as we are aware no British publication records any species of moss as a foodplant for any British member of the Hepialidae, although moss-feeding is known elsewhere in this cosmopolitan family, for example in New Zealand.

On 3 April 2004, we discovered three final instar larvae of this species under the moss *Mnium hornum* Hedw., which was growing on the spreading roots of oak trees at Ashurst, Hampshire (VC 11). In captivity the larvae were given only this moss, which they readily ate. There was no sign of *Pteridium aquilinum* near where the larvae were found. Our tentative larval identification was confirmed when a female *Hepialus hecta* emerged on 12 May 2004.— P. H. STERLING, Environmental Services, Dorset County Council, County Hall, Colliton Park, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ and R. J. HECKFORD, 67 Newnham Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 4AW.

New and overlooked herbivores of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum* (L.) Kuhn), including the Vapourer *Orgyia antiqua* (L.) (Lep.: Lymantriidae)

The insect fauna feeding on the bracken fern, *Pteridium aquilinum*, is among the most thoroughly documented in Britain, because of interest in the potential use of insects as biological control agents against this invasive plant, and because of detailed ecological work by J. H. Lawton investigating the structure of the bracken herbivore community (1976. *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* 73: 187-216; 1988. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B* 318: 335-355; 2000. *Community ecology in a changing world*. Ecology Institute, Oldendorf/Luhe). Although bracken has a reputation as a difficult plant for insects to exploit, Lawton lists around 40 insect species as bracken herbivores in Britain, with approximately 27 species occurring commonly. These numbers are what might be expected for a common and widespread British plant.

During intensive sampling of bracken herbivores in dense monocultures of bracken at Harding's Down, Glamorgan (O. S. grid reference SS 4390) in 2002, 2003 and 2004, using searches and sweep netting, we recorded three Lepidoptera species not listed by Lawton. In all cases we were able to rear larvae through to pupation on bracken. Feeding larvae of the Vapourer Moth *Orgyia antiqua* were recorded on several occasions. This species is known to be polyphagous on a wide variety of trees and shrubs, but we have been unable to find a previous record of it using bracken. The Grey Pug *Eupithecia subfuscata* (Haworth) was also recorded

frequently; although not listed by Lawton and other recent authors, this species was noted as a bracken herbivore by Tutt (1906. *Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation* **18**: 179-182). Finally, Lawton (1976. *Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society* **73**: 187-216) lists *Laconobia oleracea* (L.) as a possible bracken herbivore, 'not confirmed by field sampling or more recent literature'. This species was the most frequently encountered species of Lepidoptera feeding on bracken at our study site.

We are grateful to the Natural Environment Research Council (Grant NER/M/S/2002/00107) for funding our research on bracken herbivores and their parasitoids, and thank the Llangennith, Llanmadoc and Cheriton Commoners and Sion Brackenbury of the Gower Commons Initiative for facilitating fieldwork at this site.— OWEN T. LEWIS, ALEX M. LORD, AND PAM BAKER, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3PS (E-mail: owen.lewis@zoo.ox.ac.uk).

***Epiphyas postvittana* (Walker) (Lep.: Tortricidae) damaging apricot fruits in Tyne and Wear**

Epiphyas postvittana (Walker), also known as the Light Brown Apple Moth, is an Australian tortrix moth that became established in south west England in 1936. It has since spread widely and has been recorded as a pest of a wide range of ornamental plants. The larvae usually feed in shoot tips or between leaves bound together with silk. Despite its common name, this moth is not a significant pest of apples in Britain, unlike in its native Australia.

On 14 June 2004, I was sent a nearly ripe apricot fruit from a garden in Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear (O.S. grid reference NZ 338721). This had a single caterpillar feeding inside the fruit near the stone. The larva left the fruit and pupated a week later, with the adult moth emerging on 5 July 2004. The owner of the apricot reported that many of the fruits on the tree were affected and that a similar infestation had occurred the previous year. The apricot was being grown in a pot that is kept in a glasshouse during January to late June, after which it is placed out of doors. The fruit on a peach and nectarine in the same glasshouse had not been damaged.

I am grateful for Mr Kirby Haye for sending me the caterpillar-infested apricot from his garden.— A. J. HALSTEAD, RHS Garden, Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB.

Female sex bias in captive bred Winter Moth *Operophtera brumata* (L.) (Lep: Geometridae)

We report an unexpected finding relating to two separate batches of adult Winter Moths *Operophtera brumata* (L.) bred from larvae obtained in the spring of 2004 (five and seven specimens collected in Lancashire and Surrey, respectively) which